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REDNERSVILLE — Flying has never been just a job for Fern Villeneuve.

The 77-year-old pilot has been flying for most of his life, but being a pilot wasn't so much about employment as it was a childhood goal and life-long passion.

This May his skill, ambition, and leadership in 60 years of aviation will be honoured as Villeneuve is inducted into Canada's Air Force Hall of Fame.

Justin Cuffe, the venue's curator-administrator, describes the retired lieutenant-colonel as "the founding father" of Canadian military aerobatics.

Villeneuve's career as both a pilot and an officer is impressive, Cuffe said.

"You couldn't get much better than that sort of record," he said, noting Villeneuve holds one of only six peacetime Air Force Crosses awarded by the Canadian military.

"He's quite influential with the development of aviation in the air cadets."

"It's a great honour," Villeneuve says, calling the news "marvelous."

"It's nice to have your efforts recognized, even if you enjoyed doing it."

For Villeneuve, his lifetime of flying was the realization of a dream he's had since childhood: to spend as much time in the air as possible.

Having earned his first pilot's licence in 1946, Villeneuve joined the Royal Canadian Air Force in 1950. Over the next four decades, he would fly virtually all of the military's top fighters.

He was the founding squadron leader of the Golden Hawks, a group of Sabre pilots who in the late 1950s and 1960s raised the RCAF's profile by

Time after time, Villeneuve found ways to fly, even when his day job required him to be more of

an administrator.

Villeneuve was awarded a rare honour, the Air Force Cross, after landing his burning F-86 Sabre on a New Brunswick runway instead of saving himself and letting the airplane drop onto a nearby town. He would become so associated with the Sabre that in 1997, as the Royal Canadian Mint made coins featuring Canadian aircraft and their pilots, his face was chosen to appear on the \$20 Sabre collector coin.

His work with the Golden Hawks is credited with creating such a demand for a Canadian military aerobatic team that it inspired more such teams, most notably today's Snowbirds.

After retiring as a lieutenant-colonel, Villeneuve spent 20 years with the Royal Canadian Air Cadet Corps, including five of them as head of the Trenton-based program and many more towing young cadets into the air in their gliders.

He now spends much of his time looking after the two-seat Globe Swift prop plane he owns with wife Lynda. Villeneuve isn't the type to boast about his career; in fact, getting him to tell stories from his military days takes some asking. But he's happy to be part of the hall of fame, and proud of his lifetime of flight.

"Wouldn't trade it," he said. "I'm very lucky."